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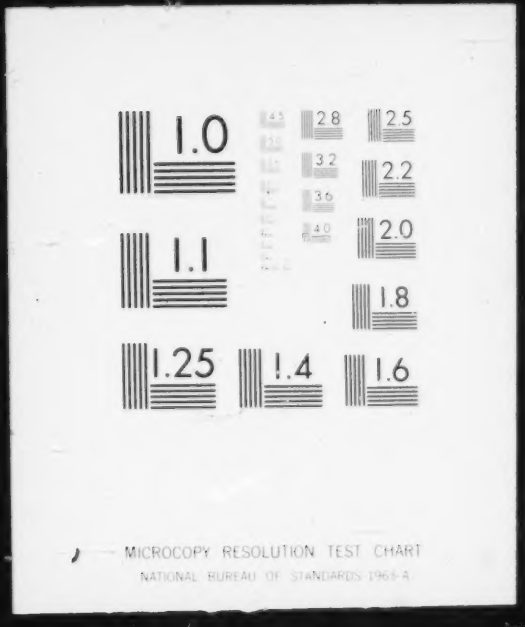

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ABSTRACT

The author explains how the traditional (hierarchical and bureaucratic) school district model inhibits citizen participation, and he describes the effects on citizen participation of two other models -- a decentralized model or a community control model. Chicago's experience with a decentralized model and New York City's experience with a community control model are described in order to demonstrate the problems that arise in those models. The author concludes that the model needed by school administrators for community involvement is a political one. In such a model, the administrator is involved in the political influence process -- negotiating, bargaining, and making tradeoffs. (JF)

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ALTERNATIVE STRATEGIES OF CITIZEN PARTICIPATION IN THE PUBLIC SCHOOLS*

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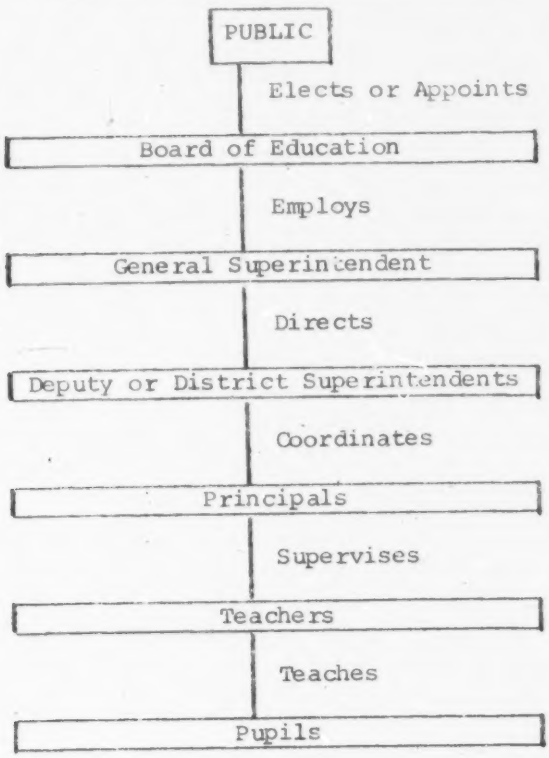
ALTERNATIVE STRATEGIES OF CITIZEN PARTICIPATION
IN THE PUBLIC SCHOOLS

The Typical Model

We are told that in Colonial Days the education in New England was characterized by broad participation of citizens in policy formation.[1] The notion of the town meeting which dealt with education as with other governmental functions comes to mind. As towns became more populous and schooling more complex certain persons accepted particular responsibility for the governance of education. This development, accompanied by the appearance of professional school administrators, eventually developed into the familiar model of the school district. This is usually represented schematically as shown in Figure 1.[2]

Figure 1.

The Typical Model (Simplified)



This approximates the prevailing organizational model which will be referred to as the typical model. To this hierarchical design were added the essential elements of bureaucracy[3] in accordance with the Weberian conception of an ideal bureaucracy. We need not be concerned here with variations of line and staff since our concern is with the role of the citizen in the outside world. (Staff relationships were not drawn in the schematic representation of the typical model.)

Basically, the citizen was to be represented by the elected or appointed board of education.[4] In theory the old individual participation of the town meeting model was replaced by delegates or representatives in the typical model.

Of course the citizen, particularly the parent of a school pupil, also had direct relationships with administrators and teachers at the local school building level. These relationships were circumscribed, by the concept of professionalism and the tenets of bureaucracy. These elements, which accompany the typical model, structure the roles of educators and citizens. The educator is the professional responsible to other professionals who are ultimately responsible to the representative board. As the citizen relates to the professional at the building level it is not to discuss objectives. These are determined at the top of the organizational chart.

In effect, there is almost nothing in the typical model to guide or explain the role of citizens at the building level. There is a general dictum that school administrators should "have good public relations." Sometimes the term "community relations" may be used. In either case it may be interpreted to mean only that the building administrators should keep anything from happening which will lead to attention that is unfavorable or even embarrassing to the superordinate school administrators.

This is an extremely negative view of the matter, but I believe it is a fair statement of the case and indicates the absence of a working model or conceptual design to serve as a guide to administrators and the public.

At any rate, there is this general notion that local administrators should cultivate cordial rather than hostile relationships with citizens. This condition is, however, effectively neutralized by elements of the bureaucratic-professional model. Educators deal with parents from a position of superior knowledge and status and they are, as bureaucrats, supposed to act in non-emotional, universalistic ways. A superior bureaucrat is not ideally suited to establishing rapport.

Another negative aspect of the local school public-relations climate is caused by the administrator's need to protect pupils and to preserve a safe environment for learning.[5] This is evidenced by placards such as those reproduced in Figures 2 and 3. Even though the wording in the "Visitors Welcome Signs" could be improved, the intended message remains: Keep Out! Administrators in giant urban schools have even found it necessary to station uniformed guards to enforce the message of the signs. Mechanisms such as this help preserve a learning environment of sorts (an island, an oasis?). They also create a schism between school and community. They intimidate citizens and discourage visitors.

Figure 2.
Visitors Sign--Ohio

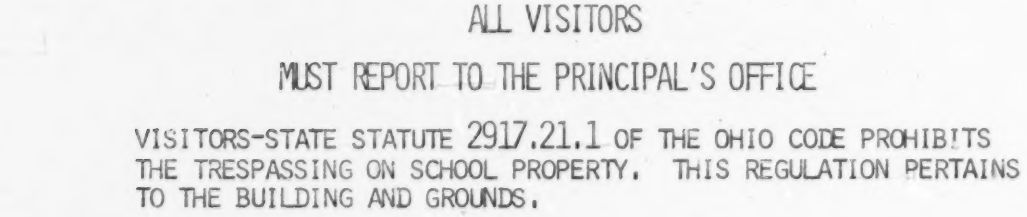

ALL VISITORS
MUST REPORT TO THE PRINCIPAL'S OFFICE
VISITORS-STATE STATUTE 2917.21.1 OF THE OHIO CODE PROHIBITS THE TRESPASSING ON SCHOOL PROPERTY. THIS REGULATION PERTAINS TO THE BUILDING AND GROUNDS.

Figure 3.
Visitors Sign--Chicago

WELCOME

PARENTS AND OTHER VISITORS ON SCHOOL BUSINESS ARE ALWAYS WELCOME IN THE CHICAGO PUBLIC SCHOOLS.

PLEASE GO DIRECTLY TO THE OFFICE OF THE PRINCIPAL.

JAMES F. REDMOND
GENERAL SUPERINTENDENT OF SCHOOLS

NOTE: "A PERSON COMMITS DISORDERLY CONDUCT WHEN HE KNOWINGLY: (1) DOES ANY ACT IN SUCH UNREASONABLE MANNER AS TO ALARM OR DISTURB ANOTHER AND TO PROVOKE A BREACH OF THE PEACE; . . . A PERSON CONVICTED OF A VIOLATION. . .SHALL BE FINED NOT TO EXCEED $500. . . ."

CRIMINAL CODE OF ILLINOIS
CH. 38, PAR. 26-1 (ILL. REV. STAT. 1967)

If the posture of the public schools is merely restrictive toward parents, it is well-nigh prohibitive to citizens who are not parents of pupils in a given school. Clearly they do not belong and the burden is theirs to show cause why they should pause on school premises. And this is quite proper for, according to the typical model, there is no valid role for any adult other than a parent or an employee in the school environment. The "public" is shown once, and only once, at the top of the figure where they are placed to select a representative school board.

Adding to the difficulty of the administrator's task at the building level is a seldom-voiced but quite real fear of parents by teachers. This is somewhat related to elements of professionalism (the professional cannot be questioned by the client in matters professional). But, because education is often viewed as a pseudo-profession,[6] the professional is not really "protected"from his clients by the intricate mysteries of his craft. In effect, anyone can understand and discuss education. So, the teacher, not

having a secure professional armor, is vulnerable to the parents of his assigned clients.[7]

Teachers in this situation look to administrators to "protect" them from parents. And, because teaching is so far from being a science, the precise teacher expectation is that the administrator will back the teacher in all situations whether the teacher has acted wisely or unwisely, rightly or wrongly. The teacher belief is that a united front must be presented to the "outsiders" and that any criticism of the teacher must be delayed until the confrontation is over and then such criticism should be given in strictest confidence. Such behavior by administrators will be perceived as loyal and good by teachers.

An institutional representation of the attitude of teachers toward parents is found in a recent headline "New York Teachers to Walk Out if Parents Walk In."[8] This refers to a new union policy which provides that "if a group attempts to enter a classroom, the teacher shall, first, notify the principal that unless the intruders leave immediately, no teacher will be able to remain in the classroom." It is interesting to note that the policy could permit groups to observe teachers maintaining "surveillance" over pupils but not teaching them. The purpose of the policy is to prevent community boards or principals from allowing groups of parents to observe and evaluate.

Much more could be said about the built-in rigidity of the typical model which, though it protects the school system from isolated attacks, fails to allow local school units to respond appropriately to changing situations. Concerns of individuals or groups which cannot be accomodated at the local level must be passed, like the ubiquitous bucks they are, up the hierarchy to the top. Or they may be shifted directly from the local school

to the top. However, at the top they are quite properly perceived as local and perhaps particular to one or only a few individuals or schools. And the top must deal with the broad perspective.

Thus, we have a stalemate of sorts built into the typical model. Local problems are out of place at the top but the local level does not seem to have the capability of taking the initiative in solving such problems. When such problems do reach the top (and there are countless ways they can be diverted on the tortuous route) they are typically routed back "down" through the levels in the organization chart for appropriate action. I cannot explain precisely how or even where it happens, but somewhere in this re-routing process there is invariably added an implication that each level is being censured (mildly or severely depending upon circumstances) for the disturbance of equilibrium at higher levels. Again this is dysfunctional in the typical model. The previously mentioned general policy to not rock the boat, grease the squeaking wheel, or whatever leads to a directive to do something to remove the pressure (threat?) which has found its way to the top. However, the addition of explicit or implicit criticism of levels intervening between the top and the point of pressure creates hostility toward the "offending" citizen who started the whole thing. This hostility whether communicated overtly or covertly by the school administrator who deals with the citizen creates tension and distrust which exacerbates the situation and nullifies the intent of the general desire for "good" community relations.

There is a saying which throws much light on this malfunction of the typical model. It is "going over the head" of an individual at any level in the organizational chart. The model suggests (better word--requires) that communication proceed "through channels." When levels are bypassed, the model

has been circumvented and, quite naturally, this is an event of some degree of embarassment to all those who, by virtue of their positions in the organization, are obligated to preserve and utilize the model.

Decentralization

The preceding discussion of the typical model should have demonstrated that as presently constituted it is not sufficiently open to respond to the changing local situations. This has been recognized by school administrators for years. The best known, first attempted response has been termed "decentralization." The notion here is that some elements of administrative authority are released to the local districts or schools. The decentralization may be to areas or districts or to individual schools. It is seldom released to the classroom level. If the necessary authority for decision-making has been delegated down the organization, the up-down flow of communication can be significantly short-circuited.

The failure of the simplistic response of decentralization is so well established in urban areas that it does not require documentation. Often the decentralization was merely a semantic arrangement which required another copy of each piece of correspondence to the newly designated site of authority. Even when it was done in good faith, it was seldom accompanied by a freeing of resources and sufficient controls to the lower levels. Administrators were still tied to the same line allocations on budgets. The district-wide textbook adoptions were observed. Personnel were assigned and reassigned by the central office. Conditions such as these made it impossible for lower level administrators to really accept and exercise the new autonomous leadership supposed to accompany decentralization.

The decentralization model just discussed really makes no provision for a change in the role of the citizen. He still participates in policy formation at the board level and still approaches the professional at the building level as a lay client to the professional educator. True, many decentralization plans provided for the creation of additional community advisory boards at district or even building level. But these boards were not to be involved in policy formation. They were to be antennae of the schools or sounding boards.

The presence of the citizen-educator schism was shown in the constitution and functioning of many community boards. These were often chaired by the district superintendent or principal concerned. In one city district, large numbers of these advisory boards had never been convened by their principal-chairmen. This despite a board of education directive which mandated the functioning of such boards as part of a city-wide school-community study of education. This could be interpreted as arrogance. I see it rather as defensiveness based on fear.

After three years of experience with such community boards the Chicago schools were forced to admit that they were failures.[9] The boards were then functioning in only six of the city's 27 districts. One board member complained that : ". . .part of the failure may stem from the fact that some school officials lack respect for parents and others who are highly educated." Another board member deplored: ". . .the limited interpretation the administration seems to have put on the councils, leaving most of the power in the hands of the district superintendents." Other board members agreed that the plan had failed in its purpose of giving the board some way of hearing from the "grass roots."

The district superintendents predictably were concerned that councils wanted to: "play an increasing policy making or executive function" and "refused to follow the guidelines established by the board." The superintendents balked at forming councils because: "the prospective members run the gamut of polarized opinion from extreme liberalism to extreme conservatism." The superintendents reasoned in advance that councils formed of persons holding such conflicting views about schools would be unproductive battlegrounds. At early stages in the effort to establish community councils many of the potential members found that they were able to have more of a voice and gain their objectives more effectively through pressure groups which dealt directly with board members.

It seems that the preceding remarks about councils to accompany decentralization programs represent well the limitations of this attempt to modify the typical model. In retrospect, what happened is easily predictable. That is, schoolmen will resist even the limited influence intended to be allowed to the councils. Unless the board mandated in the most forceful terms that councils be formed, they were not formed. If forced to form councils schoolmen would make them as "friendly" as possible. Citizens would accurately perceive the limitations of councils and would rapidly abandon them and redirect their efforts where there seemed at least a chance of influencing a decision-maker rather than going through motions with a middle management administrator. That is what we could have predicted and that is, in essence, what happened.

Community Control

As district and local advisory boards refused to function as so called "rubber stamps" or impotent advisors to an absentee landlord central

board and his resident administrator, the decentralization force moved into the next phase of "community control." Initially the semantic preference was for community "involvement" but the issue was quickly identified as community "control." Things are never so clearly defined, but it helps to distinguish the phases of the development if we think of them as administrative decentralization contrasted with community control.

In viewing administrative decentralization we are discussing which functions are released from the central office level to other levels and to what extent. In decentralization the role of the citizen need not have been altered so much as an iota even though his local school could have become somewhat more responsive to his needs.

In discussing community control we are confronting the much more threatening (to the professional educator) question of how much decision-making power has been granted to (seized by?) what segments of the community. Just how sharply this controversy could be drawn was quickly demonstrated by the most notorious conflict and community involvement to this date: Ocean Hill-Brownsville.

Fred Hechinger of the New York Times was to devote many articles to Ocean Hill-Brownsville. In one of these he set the general theme: "Demands by masses of people to run institutions which hitherto have been run for them by a central establishment are rising everywhere."[10] Another item in the same issue as Hechinger's editorial introduced a frightening variation on the general theme: "Race: The Third Party in the School Crisis."[11] The teachers strike and the community efforts to keep schools open had pitted white teacher's union members against black parents. Teachers quite obviously feared that a black community board would deal unfairly with

white personnel. The black community as analyzed by Roberts in the Times did not trust whites and felt that the "white people really don't care about us."

Albert Shanker, president of the United Federation of Teachers in New York City, was also destined to write many columns about the decentralization experiments. Mr. Shanker and occasional guest columnists presented a weekly column in advertising space in the Times immediately adjacent to the space usually filled by Mr. Hechinger's column. Shanker was only doing on a larger scale what many creative school superintendents have been doing for years. The difference is that space was usually provided for the superintendent's weekly column whereas the Union purchased their space. The Union columns presented cogent explications of the inconsistencies and flaws in decentralization plans. Headings of some of the recent columns suggest the orientation: "Decentralization: Closer Look at a Sacred Cow," "School Decentralization: A Troubled Picture Emerges," "School Decentralization Have its Claims Proved Valid?" "Ocean Hill-Brownsville: Why the Experiment Failed," "Decentralization II: The New York Experience," "Community Control: Separatism Repackaged," (by Bayard Rustin).[12]

Ocean Hill-Brownsville survived somehow and is almost certainly the most thoroughly documented case study of the problems of moving toward community control.[13] Others learned from the trials of New York and avoided some of the conflict. Meanwhile, the pressure for community control seemed to grow ever stronger as a result of far reaching social forces augmented by well placed foundation funds[14] and mandated by the by-now ubiquitous federal guidelines.

In a debate on what was initially intended to be "Decentralization" but became "Community Control" Walter Degnan, President, Council of Supervisors

Association, New York City Schools, opposed Mario Fantini, Program Officer, Ford Foundation. Mr. Degnan maintained that community control is a false premise because city people do not know each other, there is too much mobility of population, and there is a lack of fiscal control with community control.[15]

Mr. Degnan went on to cite ten specific weaknesses of community control:

1. Education gets poorer in "poor" districts because teachers and principals have no control.
2. It is more expensive.
3. Militant activists take over--not parents.
4. Chaos develops from confrontation of local and central school board.
5. An exodus from the city of middle class families results.
6. Principals are unable to exercise educational leadership and lose the professional attitude toward their jobs.
7. It destroys democratic foundations to suit purely local desires.
8. It sacrifices the education of children to social theories.
9. It ignores "due process" of law.
10. It does not strengthen the educational process.[16]

Despite these caveats, Mr. Degnan made it clear that he favored community involvement and participation. He placed his emphasis on efforts to find the best education for poor children and the need of finding superior teachers.

His opponent, Dr. Mario Fantini of the Ford Foundation, believed that the educational system needs reform even at the expense of upheaval if need be. He stressed these points:

1. The educational institution is obsolescent and needs reform rather than improvement.
2. The present relationships between the school, pupil, and parent are dysfunctional and we are now experiencing a period of realignment.

3. The public must decide what kind of school it wants.

4. Educators become too defensive when challenged.

5. The new option to try to improve education by participation should not be denied.

6. New plans cannot be superimposed on the existing system.[17]

There are many nuances in this controversy about community control. It is a vital issue but as it usually develops has not made all that much impact on the learning of school children. Sometimes that--the learning--almost seems to be irrelevant to the arguments put forth by all parties to the argument. And, of course, aspects of this issue are symptomatic of a political-ideological battle which is no less real for being unknown to the majority of participants in the school controversy. This would-be social revolution is a most difficult element in the controversy. It adds geometrically to the problems of school reform. Thanks to the visibility of Ivan Illich and others it is now quite clear that there actually are those who unashamedly seek to destroy the public schools. Hence, a schoolman who suspects a conspiracy need not be paranoid, although it is rarely an element in the usual pressures for more citizen involvement and control.

The undeniable fact that the educational institution is under attack makes it difficult for school administrators to avoid showing the defensiveness deplored by those who have followed the process of decentralization and community control. It also makes it awkward for non-revolutionary reformers who see themselves as friends of the schools.

Implications

The Trend

There is little doubt that the role of citizens in decision-making for schools is in a state of change. At this point in time it is fair to

describe the change as a trend away from political representation on a city-wide board toward some more direct involvement at local levels.[18] The new role has not yet achieved either sufficient clarity or stability to be defined. The new involvement, often mandated[19] may run the gamut from token citizen involvement to destructive power plays.[20]

Model Needed

It seems clear that the model for community involvement now needed by school administrators is a political model. Administrators must be involved in political influence process--negotiating, bargaining, making trade-offs. Conflict is likely to become the norm rather than the traumatic exception. When dealing with the new public the administrator is primarily engaged in policy formation not policy execution.

Some important concerns for administrators are to determine to whom the schools are to be responsible and for what. Bureaucratic practices may be retained for system-wide general goals, but these must be clearly understood. Tasks which have taken on new importance are determining educational needs and educating (informing, persuading) the community. What is happening in citizen involvement is not so much an educational issue as it is a reallocation of power and influence.[21] The building administrator (principal) is something other than a mini-superintendent, although he must now engage in many activities once the sole prerogative of the superintendent. The administrator needs to know the varied perceptions of parents and teachers.[22] More important, he needs to be able to exercise leadership in moving fron a conflict situation to policy determination and execution. And for this, he needs a model which our conceptualizers have not yet evolved.

Administrator Preparation

Neither pre-service nor in-service training programs for administrators have adjusted to the changing requirements for effective leadership in the political tasks of school administration. Some have moved quickly to acquaint administrators with the new technology, but little help is available in mastering the skills of political leadership as compared to bureaucratic leadership, aside from internships. (And what help is there for the cooperating administrator who is serving as a role model for the intern-administrator?) Universities and school districts will need to offer new training and create support systems for administrators while they master their new roles. Although the best solutions are not in hand, we know enough to avoid repeating mistakes made in the early days of the attempts to arrange new ways of citizen involvement in the public schools.

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[1]See, for example, Roald F. Campbell, et al. The Organization and Control of American Schools, Second Edition (Columbus, Ohio: Charles Merrill Publishing Co., 1970), p. 9.

[2]For a more complete description of the typical model see: Daniel Griffiths, et al. Organizing Schools for Effective Education (Danville, Illinois: The Interstate, 1962), p. 21.

[3]See Max Weber, Essays in Sociology (translated by H. H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills, New York: Oxford University Press, 1958), Ch. VIII, especially p. 214 or James G. Anderson, Bureaucracy in Education (Baltimore, Maryland: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1968, Chapter 1.

[4]More than 95 percent of local boards are elected. More than 85 percent of all board members are elected. Larger cities are more likely to have appointed boards than other districts. See, Stephen J. Knezevich, Administration of Public Education, Second Edition (New York: Harper and Row, 1969), p. 225.

[5]See, "Why This Rage," New York Times, November 5, 1972.

[6]See, Myron Lieberman, Education As A Profession (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall Inc., 1956).

[7]Richard Saxe, "An Unstudied Problem: Parent Visiting," The Educational Forum, XXXIII (January, 1969), p. 241-245.

[8]Educators Negotiating Service, July 1, 1972.

[9]Chicago Tribune, March 27, 1979.

[10]New York Times, September 22, 1968.

[11]Steven V. Roberts, Ibid.

[12]See, New York Times for August 8, 1971; February 27, 1972; May 14, 1972; June 1, 1972, and others. All articles noted are by A. Shanker except the one credited to Mr. Rustin.

[13]See for example, Barbara Carter, Pickets Parents and Power: The Story Behind the New York City Teachers Strike, (New York: Citation Press, 1971), especially "Chronology;" Miriam Wasserman, The School Fix NYC USA, (New York: Outerbridge and Dienstfrey, 1970); and Henry M. Levin (ed.) Community Control of Schools, (Washington, D.C.: The Brookings Institution, 1970).

[14]Ford Foundation Grants assisted early efforts at community control in Ocean Hill-Brownsville.

[15]Walter Degnan, "Remarks on Decentralization," Speech for Pre-convention meeting of DESP Large City Principals Associations, Las Vegas, Nevada, April 14, 1969.

[16]Ibid.

[17]Mario Fantini, Ibid.

[18]The recently issued "Fleischmann Report" recommends Parent Advisory Councils, ". . .in the belief that the district that permits its educational affairs to be entrusted exclusively to its professional administrators may subsequently have great difficulty in reasserting its legitimate interests when and if particular issues require it." New York State Commission on the Quality, Cost and Financing of Elementary and Secondary Education, Summary of Volumes II and III: Commission Report (Albany, New York: State Education Department, 1972), p. 40.

[19]A draft of a proposed "Illinois Program for Evaluation, Supervision, and Recognition of Schools" mandates widespread community involvement and participation. Local goals would have to be consistent with state goals. The state goals, "encompass involving the local community in all phases of a school's operations, including but not limited to policy decisions, administration and discipline, curriculum and extra-curricular activities." See, Hope Justus, "Bakalis Drafts a Bombshell," Chicago Tribune, July 21, 1962.

[20]An early, influential proponent of decentralization, Kenneth Clark, has come full circle and now calls it a "disaster." Clark now believes that politics and selfish interests have obliterated the basic issue: teaching children. See Education Summary, December 22, 1972.

[21]Much light is shed on the dynamics of the power transfers in community organization projects of various types in: Irving A. Spergel (ed.) Community Organization: Studies in Constraint (Beverly Hills, California: Sage Publications, 1972), p. 26, passim.

[22]For a revealing example of how these purposes can vary in important ways see: Harry Gottesfeld, Educational Issues of the Ghetto as Seen by Community People and Educators. Final Report, 1969, Project No. 8-B-092, Ferkauf Graduate School of Humanities and Social Sciences, Yeshiva University. ED 038 481.